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ABSTRACT

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Facing moral problems in teaching multiculturalism: Using pragmatism as a problem-solving tool

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2

Abstract

This article applies pragmatic thinking to a moral problem in a multiculturalism classroom: how to draw together students' diverse experiences and familiarity with racial identity development for productive examinations of White privilege, racial identity development and the social construction of race in the United States. This analysis reveals several durable dichotomies that can serve to distinguish Students of Color from White Students in unproductive ways such as concealing how Students of Color and White Students need one another to create dissonance and to reflect on their emerging identities. The author suggests, however, that conceiving of the multiculturalism classroom's primary purpose as a developmental tool for individual students diminishes its potential as a location to sponsor a moral community that fosters a sense of the collective and of mutual multicultural problem solving. The author concludes by highlighting pedagogical tools that can foster a pragmatic multicultural classroom.

Facing Moral Problems in Teaching Multiculturalism:

Using pragmatism as a problem-solving tool

I first started to notice an interesting pattern in my multiculturalism course last spring as I was planning to teach the course for the third time. As I examined the student comments from the two other times I had offered this course, I began to notice that Students of Color experienced the course very differently from White Students.[1] White students frequently reported how significant the course was to their thinking about the importance of racial identity development, the ways in which they had benefited from White privilege, and the uncovering of "meritocracy" as a formerly unexamined belief. Students of Color indicated that the course was important for helping them recognize that some White people really cared about eradicating racism. At the same time, they remained critical of the class due to their continued amazement that the struggle with racial identity was just hitting the White Students. Their question was simple: how could a multiculturalism course succeed at developing all students when one group of students was at such a significantly different place from themselves?

This significant difference between the experiences of the students in my class forced me to consider how I could construct a better course, one that offered White students the opportunity to explore their Whiteness, a condition necessary for a full examination of multiculturalism (Ortiz 2000), while also supporting Students of Color as they explored their own racial identity, despite the fact that Students of Color frequently had more experience in examining the idea of racial identity than their White classmates. Framed in this way, it was clear that this was a moral issue: All of my students needed support, but these two groups of students seemed to need something different. Initially, I thought of these groups of students as two separate entities, with

substantially different needs. However, as I explore later in this paper, this kind of thinking ignored many interdependencies White students and Students of Color share in the multiculturalism classroom. This led to a further question about the context of my thinking. Why did I initially think of these groups separately? Was there a broader, more public educational problem manifest in my thinking about my own classroom circumstances?

Course Context

The course is a 200-level elective called "Multiculturalism and Education." About half the students in the course are typically pre-service teachers, while the other half come from disciplines throughout the university, including Engineering, the sciences, and the humanities. White Students make up the majority of the class, with about one-third of the students representing African-American, Asian, Asian-American, Latino/a, and bi-racial backgrounds. About two-thirds of the students are female. I am a married white female, in my third year of a tenure track appointment, at a small liberal arts university. I have worked in universities as an administrator and teacher for the past twelve years.

The course is capped at 25 students and is a writing intensive course, which means that we use writing as a way of learning. Writing assignments include frequent drafts of two major papers, weekly journal entries, and in-class writing exercises. The first third of the course focuses on the racial identity development of self and others, the second third focuses on the interplay between identity development and schooling practices, and the final third examines the application of multicultural theory in schools.

During the first third of the course students write their racial autobiography, drawing on the work of Helms (1990), Tatum (1999) and several others including LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's *Our America: Life and death on the south side of Chicago*, Heather Dalmage's

Tripping on the Color Line : Black-white Multiracial Families in a Racially Divided World, Jeff Hitchcock's *Unraveling the White Cocoon*, Lorraine Kenny's *Daughters of Suburbia: Growing up White, Middle Class, and Female*, and Guadalupe Valdés' *Con Respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. In the second third of the course we read Meredith Moran's *Class Dismissed*, the story of Berkeley High School and its struggle as a multiracial school to help all students succeed. The final third of the course focuses on James Banks' *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*. In addition, there is a service-learning component where students spend 10 hours over the course of the semester in an educational or non-profit agency examining how multiculturalism affects the work that goes on at the site. Students have worked in a prison-related agency which advocates for inmates' rights, a local AIDS advocacy organization, a local school district tutoring second language learners and at an alternative education site which serves students from the local districts who have been deemed unable to continue with conventional public schooling.

Thinking like a pragmatist

As I began to ponder the challenge of constructing a class for the varying needs of my students, I turned to the work of classical pragmatism to direct my thinking. As a philosophical approach that began in the mid-1800s with philosophers such as William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, pragmatism has recently experienced a renaissance, with many authors examining the potential benefits of a pragmatic focus for problems in various aspects of social life such as history, the humanities, critical theory and higher education (Antonio 1989; Diggins 1994; Kimball 1995; Warehime 1993).

I turned to pragmatism, and classical pragmatism in particular, for help with this problem for several reasons. First, my dissertation and subsequent work in education has explored the usefulness of pragmatism to help schools solve their moral problems (Feuerstein 1997; Henry 2001), and I was particularly interested to see how pragmatism might work on a local problem in my classroom. Second, as Louis Menand (1997) points out, from its very beginning pragmatism has focused on cultural pluralism and initiated work to address xenophobia. Third, through the work of John Dewey, pragmatism is commonly understood to be aimed at healing dichotomies in thinking that get in the way of "good" thinking; thinking that actually helps people solve the problems they experience; dichotomies such as theory/practice, mind/body, head/heart, and knowing/doing draw false distinctions and therefore often get in the way of deep, investigative thought. As a student of pragmatism, I wanted to examine how my thinking about the differing needs of my students influenced the problem I believed I had.

I believed pragmatism was well suited to my challenge because it is a way of thinking about problems that is aimed at "making practice intelligent" (Boisvert 1999, 52) and directed at problems that people and organizations recognize in their own lives. By focusing heavily on communication and the links between people and organizations in society, pragmatism seeks to examine moral problems in the context in which they occur. Following this line of thinking, pragmatism argues for two primary emphases in problem solving: 1) a thorough investigation of the interests that bear on the problem and 2) intelligent inquiry, testing and review of potential solutions to the problem. Different from its philosophical ancestors which focused on establishing "first principles" and universal virtues for morality, pragmatism is essentially a way of thinking about the problems people experience, focused on finding cooperative solutions through an examination of the mutual interests people share.

Examining the needs of the students: racial identity theory and common aims

Pragmatism helped me begin to address the issue of the differing needs among White Students and Students of Color by prompting me to consider the question more deeply. As Menand (1997) suggests, "Pragmatism is… an effort to unhitch human beings from what pragmatists regard as a useless structure of bad abstractions about thought" (1). One such abstraction that Dewey emphasized was the individual/social divide. Dewey believed that talking about either of these elements as if they did not depend on one another was a serious source of distraction and a waste of educator energy. In *The Public and Its Problems,* Dewey wrote "[T]here is no sense in asking how individuals come to be associated. They exist and operate in association" (Dewey 1927/1954, 23). Thus, rather than asking what I could do to parts of the class to appeal to certain learners, pragmatism suggested that I explore what these learners had in common and how they needed each other.[2]

To investigate this perspective, I turned to racial identity theory to find the mutual processes and experiences that existed between Students of Color and White Students. Long understood to be a leader in racial identity theory, Janet Helms (1999) provided the most recent work that describes the process of racial identity formation for People of Color and White people in terms of "ego status" rather than stages. Helms describes this change as important for indicating that rather than going through a linear progression toward sophisticated thinking and self awareness, individuals experience racial identity development as a "dynamic evolution" akin to a spiral organization of experiences (Helms 1999, 84).

In Helms' model, People of Color refers to "Asian, African, Latino/Latina, and Native Americans of color living in the United States" regardless of the "continental origins of their ancestry" (Helms 1999, 85). White people refers to Americans who either "self-identify or are

commonly identified as belonging exclusively to the White racial group regardless of their continental source (e.g. Europe, Asia) of that racial ancestry" (Helms 1994, 126). Users of Helms' developmental theory should be careful to not to expect all "People of Color," a vast group to be sure, to fit each of the status positions described below. The same is true of identity development models for White Students: not all students fit easily within the constructed categories. While Students of Color or White Students are clearly not homogenous populations, examining racial identity theory broadly can be helpful in orienting educators to the general developmental dispositions students may be experiencing. Because Helms' work is well known, I will only briefly review the general theory for People of Color and for Whites.

Racial Identity Status Development of People of Color

Insert Table 1 about here

The racial identity development of People of Color begins with the least sophisticated status of *conformity*, where People of Color tend to adapt to and internalize White society's definition of one's own group(s). This adaptation and internalization generally occurs in the form of conforming to existing stereotypes or assimilating to White cultural values. According to Helms (1999), "... this status tends to foster information processing in which White people and their culture are idealized and anything other than White is denigrated" (Helms 1999, 86). Along with this internalized denigration, People of Color working in this status tend to be unaware of racial dynamics and may unconsciously favor Whites in situations of racial tension.

The preferencing of White culture ultimately leads a Person of Color to the next status known as *dissonance*, where disorientation and confusion pervades. The Person of Color in this

status begins to acknowledge their "lack of fit" with the White world (Helms 1999, 86), and experiences anxiety over the liminal position between the White world and one's own cultural group, while not feeling entirely comfortable in either location. People of Color in this position have a dearth of positive material about their own group(s) with which to replace their "waning idealization of the White group" (Helms 1999, 86). The anxiety created in this status position leads to *immersion*, characterized by a need to replace previous negativity with positive information about one's own culture(s) in order to reduce the anxiety felt during the dissonance status position. Visualized as a swinging pendulum, People of Color in this status position have swung from nearly complete denial of their racial being and a glorification of the White world to an idealization of all that is the antithesis of "White". In immersion, People of Color begin to use racism and race as a "simplistic" construction "in which race or racism is virtually always a central theme, and one's own group members are always right as long as they conform to externally defined standards of group-appropriate behaviors" (Helms 1999, 88). During immersion, People of Color have yet to develop a sense of personal meaning connected to the code of behavior expected by members of their group(s).

Growth from immersion to *emersion* is initiated by a solidifying of one's personal meaning in affiliation with one's own group(s). Helms (1999) describes this affective status as driven by, "... community, communalism and commitment to one's own group" (88). This status is usually accompanied by intense feelings of joy, euphoria and pride in the accomplishments of members of one's own group(s). Following the positive identification with and commitment to one's own groups, the ability to "objectively assess and respond differentially to members of one's own as well as the dominant racial group" typify movement toward the next status position known as *internalization* (Helms 1999, 88). This status is characterized by the use of

intellectualism and abstract reasoning to analyze and synthesize complex racial material. The last and most sophisticated status position for People of Color Helms describes is *integrated awareness*, which "involve[s] the capacity to express a positive racial self and to recognize and resist the multiplicity of practices that exist in one's environment to discourage positive racial self-conceptions and group expression" (Helms 1999, 89). Persons in this status are able to redefine themselves by drawing on elements that may be characteristic of other socioracial and cultural groups.

Racial Identity Ego Status Development of White People

Insert Table 2 about here

The key understanding behind White racial identity development is that White people need to recognize the implicit White privilege that surrounds their life like "smog" (Tatum 1999) and to overcome the denial of racial issues that accompanies White privilege (Helms 1999). Thus, the White racial identity process begins with the status position of *contact*. This position is characterized by a lack of awareness of the ways in which White racial group affiliation offers benefits (McIntosh 1988), and a correlating avoidance and denial of issues of racism and racial tension, "especially when such information implies something derogatory about the White group or the person as a member of that group" (Helms 1999, 91). The next status, *disintegration*, begins to occur when the White person "can no longer escape the moral dilemmas of race in this country and one's participation in them" (Helms 1999, 91). Sometimes this status position is initiated by the reactions of People of Color to White naiveté or superficiality regarding the impact of race, but more often it is accompanied by continual exposure to "circumstances where one cannot afford to ignore one's Whiteness and the socialization rules that characterize the

group because of the risk of ostracism by the White group" (Helms 1999, 91). Helms suggests that such discord in the disintegration status essentially puts the White person in the middle of a moral dilemma,

> The basic nature of the moral dilemma is that one is continuously forced to disassociate with respect to race and racism while acting toward People of Color in inhumane ways in order to be loved, accepted, and valued by significant members of the White group. When this status is in charge of the person, it is expressed as disorientation, confusion, general (sometimes debilitating) distress, and nonreceptivity to anxiety-evoking information (Helms 1999, 92).

The anxiety and confusion associated with disintegration leads the White person toward the status of *reintegration*, typified by "adopting the version of racism that exists in his or her socialization environments, which then relieves her or him of the responsibility for doing anything about it" (Helms 1999, 92). By attributing racism to socialization structures that lead some Whites to be racists and some not, the White person avoids personal accountability for the more universal functions of White privilege and racism in their immediate world. This status is often depicted by contemporary Whites dismissing any responsibility for slavery since they themselves weren't alive during that historical time period. Missing from this perspective is the notion that elements of slavery continue to live on today, yet without this awareness the White person is exonerated from complicity in contemporary vestiges of systems of slavery.

Reidentification with "good" Whites and distancing from "bad" Whites characterizes a move from reintegration to *pseudo-integration*, the next status position during which the White person fosters an intellectual commitment to alleviating racism by assisting People of Color in becoming more like Whites. This status is often evidenced by a core White privilege belief that

"if people of color just acted/did/believed as I do" then racism would end; this "rescuing" mentality relies upon the preexisting notion from the reintegration status that racism is a byproduct of a socialization system that hits some White people with the message of racism and misses others, making some Whites "bad" or "racists" and others "good" Whites or "nonracists."

Following this skewed understanding of White privilege comes *immersion*, during which the White person "attempts to recover from prior distorted racial socialization and seeks accurate information about race and racism and their pertinence to oneself" (Helms 1999, 92). Activism, a vigilant attitude, and self-analysis are key to this status. Such introspection leads the White person to the next status, *emersion*, during which White people strongly affiliate with other "reeducated" Whites (Helms 1999, 93) in order to "rejuvenat[e themselves] and [solidify their] goals of seeking new self-knowledge" (Helms 1999, 93). Similar to People of Color's identity status of emersion, this affective status is often accompanied by strong feelings such as joy and gratitude. Finalizing the White racial identity path is the most sophisticated position of *autonomy*, where the White person is able to forge a "nonracist self-affirming" identity as a racialized being and has developed the capacity to examine racial material from a sophisticated standpoint that "permits complex humanistic reactions to internal and environmental racial information" (Helms 1999, 93).

Analysis of the parallels between these two developmental models reveals two important themes relevant for a pragmatic examination. The first common theme is that both groups require dissonance to initiate movement from one ego status to another. The second common theme is the personal redefinition that typifies the most sophisticated status of development.[3]

Dissonance

Dissonance, is defined by psychologists as the "discomfort felt when new perceptions or behaviors clash with long-held beliefs" (Slavin 1994, 352). In the racial identity schema that Helms presents, People of Color first experience dissonance during the dissonance status; this lack of congruence between thought and action continues to be the impetus for movement from immersion to emersion, and emersion to internalization. For Whites, dissonance first appears during disintegration and remains through pseudo-independence.

Creating dissonance requires people to be confronted with information that is incongruent with their present mindset about a particular problem or issue. Dissonance requires that people move outside their traditional spaces to experience new perspectives, viewpoints, and beliefs. The creation of such dissonance is facilitated in a classroom environment where students operating within different racial identity status positions can respond to the comments of classmates, mutual readings, authors, and instructors. These responses can be verbal as in the case of class discussion, or in written form as in the case of journal writing and drafting papers over several months time where students can react to their own previous thoughts. Having Students of Color and White Students reacting to one another's ideas and beliefs about race, racism and multiculturalism can create the dissonance required for developmental growth. By exploring our beliefs about race and racism together, the potential occurs for real life examples and compelling stories to jostle a student into considering new thinking that accounts for the new information they have learned.

Moments like these are not new to my classroom, and I suspect not new to others who teach from a multicultural perspective. Dissonance is often accompanied by intense emotion – anger, sorrow, guilt and hurt – which are common in the multiculturalism classroom. Such

emotions are often indications that people are experiencing some sort of reconfiguration of their thought processes, stimulated by "environmental" and "institutional" cues such as a racist act on campus or learning about the tracking of students in public schools (Tatum 1999, 56). As Tatum describes, the introduction of topics such as racism, classism and sexism into the curriculum "often generates powerful emotional responses in students that range from guilt and shame to anger and despair" (Tatum 1992, 1-2). If left unaddressed, such emotions can turn into resistance. Such resistance can thwart educational goals of personal self-redefinition and understanding, as well as larger goals of promoting awareness, mutual respect and racial justice. From a psychological point of view, acknowledging and addressing the emotional components of this work can lead to greater "cognitive understanding and mastery of the material" (Tatum 1992, 2). From a pragmatic point of view, working with the emotional outcomes of examining racial identity can enhance the potential of the multicultural classroom to foster a real life opportunity to find unity embedded within our different viewpoints and developmental trajectories.

This argument should not be interpreted to mean that productive dissonance is only created by reactions between White Students and Students of Color. From a developmental point of view, it is just as important that White Students challenge one another's beliefs and statements and that Students of Color do the same for their peers. According to Helms both groups start out in a status position that favors the White world and White privilege, and consequently such same-race challenging may be even more important for students at the less sophisticated status positions. As Ortiz (2000) claims "[i]f educators want to advance students' understanding of White privilege, and relatedly, racial inequality, they need to help students explore and deconstruct White racial identity, both among Whites and non-Whites" (82). Thus, it appears to

be equally important to have a racially diverse group of students in the multicultural classroom and a mix of students who represent various developmental status positions. Without this developmental diversity, the creation of dissonance would be relegated primarily to the teacher or to classroom materials, the messages of which may be easier for students to avoid. While teachers do not control the degree of developmental mix in the classroom, they can make use of the varying experiences and developmental status positions that students exhibit. This approach is a way of organically creating dissonance in the classroom rather than importing it via hypothetical situations, which may be more likely to be looked at as suspect by resistant students.

Personal Redefinition, Reflection from Others

While dissonance is important to the continued development of racial identity, alone it is insufficient. Another commonality between the Helms' models is the notion that students must have their identity reflected back to them through their peers and environment if they are to move toward the sophisticated racial thinking typified in the latter status positions. As sociologist Charles Cooley first explored, and as George Herbert Mead amplified, the messages and feedback individuals receive from others is critical to their personality development (Eitzen 1995). As Tatum explains, one's racial identity is mediated through a myriad of dimensions, all of which are influenced by other people's ideas about those dimensions. For example, Tatum (1999) suggests that if one asked her ten-year-old son to describe himself, he would include that he's tall for his age, but would probably not include that he's Black. Tatum explains how this descriptor of height, not race, makes her son's list by using Cooley's notion of the "looking glass self",

> Why would he mention his height and not his racial group membership? When David meets new adults, one of the first questions they ask is 'How old are you?' When David states his age, the inevitable reply is 'Gee, you're tall for your age!'...Height is salient for David because it is salient for others. When David meets new adults, they don't say 'Gee, you're Black for your age'... At ten, race is not yet salient for David, because it is not yet salient for society. But it will be (Tatum 1999, 54).

Because self definition is so highly contingent on information from others, redefinition of internal beliefs about self are more likely to occur in the company of others who offer feedback to one another about one's belief systems.

Thus, for students in the midst of racial identity development, the "salience" of race in this new environment of the multicultural classroom can be key to their growth. Students need the feedback, reactions, and consequences that their classmates can provide in order to more thoroughly examine themselves, or as Helms (1999) writes, in order to "redefin[e] oneself in personally meaningful terms" (85). The "looking glass self" relative to race is exceptionally important at the college level because even though all students tend to begin their racial identity development as adolescents and continues throughout one's lifetime, during the traditional college years (18-24) such growth is accompanied and can be influenced by psychosocial, moral, epistemological, and social development.[4]

Similar to the commonality of dissonance, it is not simply enough for White Students to have the reflections of Students of Color, nor is it sufficient for Students of Color to have the reflections of White Students for furthering their personal racial identity. As both models of identity development suggest, one of the critical elements of racial identity growth is the aligning of oneself to members of one's racial group who exemplify the values and beliefs that one is

aspiring toward. Thus, White Students need White Students at various racial identity statuses to critique and push them toward new ways of thinking about race and racial inequality. Students of Color need other Students of Color to help them think more broadly about their identity and to bolster their efforts in "resist[ing] many types of oppression of one's own and others' collective identity groups without abandoning one's primary commitment to one's own group(s)" (Helms 1999, 89).

This perspective alters a common misunderstanding in multiculturalism, one that students in my classroom frequently voice: that "becoming comfortable with multiculturalism" singly requires "exposure" to people of different races. When White Students make this claim, they may actually betray an inner belief that Students of Color have to teach them about what it means to be "different." Instead, by examining what people from their own racial group(s) have to teach them about themselves, intrapersonal racial awareness is fostered. White Students can begin to understand and empathize with what their peers of color live with everyday by having to consider their own race and to make conscious decisions about what being White will mean to them. This type of learning is just as central to the racial development of Students of Color who, during the latter status positions, are searching for personally meaningful definitions of what it means to be a member of their group(s).

The context of my thinking

So far this paper has focused on the commonalities that tie Students of Color and White Students together in the multicultural classroom as a pragmatic means of responding to the moral problem of addressing different student needs within the same classroom. In addition to addressing the question of student needs, the pragmatic viewpoint also requires an investigation

of the context of the problem. In this case, I was curious as to why my first inclination was to consider these groups' needs separately. What larger dualism was functioning in the educational world that fueled my idea that this course had to be about Students of Color and White Students *as separate entities*, rather than seeing their mutuality inherent in the classroom context? As discussed in the previous section, Dewey suggests that the answer lies in the notion of dichotomies that shape the way that people articulate and think about the problems they experience. As mentioned earlier, such dichotomies often split what pragmatists consider integrally linked elements. This splitting causes thinkers to misunderstand the reciprocal influences that frame the creation of problems as well as the solutions that might help to address them.

Discovering the dichotomy I drew between Students of Color and White Students led me to consider that I might be drawing other dichotomies about my class with even deeper implications. One such dichotomy arises from an overly developmental and individualistic approach to the multicultural classroom. Such an approach draws a distinction between the individual and society and makes the assumption that individual growth leads to social growth. From this perspective, the purpose of institutions like schools is to foster individual development that will ultimately generate social development and progress in society. Taking a primarily developmental approach to crafting my multiculturalism course based primarily upon investigation of individual students' needs carries the danger of propagating this dualism because developmental theory focuses so heavily on individual growth and development. Such attention can make individual growth the primary goal of the classroom in a way that ignores the powerful communal aspects of classroom life.

In discrediting this perspective, Dewey claimed that the inherent relationship between the social and the individual gave rise to a moral purpose for classroom life, a purpose that emerged from its social situation. As Dewey wrote,

> These two facts, that moral judgment and moral responsibility are the work wrought in us by the social environment, signify that all morality is social; not because we *ought* to take into account the effect of our acts upon the welfare of others, but because of facts. Others *do* take account of what we do, and they respond accordingly to our acts. Their responses actually *do* affect the meaning of what we do (Dewey quoted in Gouinlock, 1976, 177).

Accepting the separation between the social and the individual seriously limits the purposes of the classroom to individual growth and development, based on the belief that individual growth would lead to social growth. Instead of the classroom simply being an educational space whereby individual students' identities are fostered, pragmatism suggests that the classroom can help to create the opportunity for students to see their interdependency, a connection which emphasizes the moral nature of the classroom environment. Awareness of this interdependency and the mutuality of student interests can be the starting point in the development of a moral community, one that can collectively address the moral problems that it faces, even if the particular moral problems are different.

From this perspective, social progress and order are derived from the ability of a collectivity to solve its problems through a rational process of inquiry, reflection and constructive conduct. Social order, therefore, is found in the continuing capacity of a collectivity to successfully address its problems of interdependent action. This conception of morality "portrays moral life as a set of lived agreements that do not exist within individuals per se but are created *between* individuals engaged in a process of solving their moral problems with solutions

that are sensitive to their lived situations" (Henry 2001, 276). If students are able to talk openly and honestly with one another, exposing their thinking to the scrutiny and reaction of their classmates of similar and different racial backgrounds, then the opportunity for the development of reciprocal needs and collective moral problem solving can be initiated.

Pragmatism asks the question "What are we all doing here and how do we need each other to do it?" This question contrasts substantially with the individualistic question that racial identity theory raises: "What experiences help students as individuals move from a less to more sophisticated racial identity status?" Both sets of questions are important, but the former is more likely to go unasked due to the dearth of pragmatism in the teaching of multiculturalism and multicultural theorizing. In advocating the use of prophetic pragmatism as an alternative to multicultural education, Milligan (1999) supports a balance between these two sets of questions by reminding readers of the ultimate purpose of multicultural education that can be reached when approached with a pragmatic perspective in mind: "it is clear that prophetic pragmatic multicultural education would have at its heart a moral vision of justice and love rather than a bewildering multiplicity of reified identities" (4).

Such a rearticulation of the work of the multicultural classroom can help educators not only avoid what (Milligan 1999) terms the "idolatry" of current multicultural education which reifies racial positions in inaccurate and unhelpful ways, but also the false dichotomy of Eurocentrism vs. multiculturalism. By examining what students in a multiculturalism classroom have to teach each other and the ways in which they can help one another address the questions they have about multiculturalism through the very act of making their own growth and beliefs public, the power associations with race can be reconstructed to be a "way of seeing ourselves as connected to one another" rather than an element which keeps people apart (Helfand 2002).

Given the pressing nature of multiculturalism as a contemporary moral issue in society, the creation of such a possibility seems a reasonable and necessary expectation for the multicultural education classroom.

Pragmatic Activities in the Classroom

What types of activities and classroom experiences coincide with a pragmatic perspective on multicultural education? One theme that emerges is voice. Because pragmatism centers on communication, students should practice speaking about multicultural issues as well as listening to others' perspectives. Beyond encouraging small and large group discussions in class, educators might consider creating conference calls between students and authors of texts used in class. I have frequently used this medium and have found that such interactions are of enormous value for students and their thinking. Not only do students report that talking to the author "made the book more real," but through the conversation they are able to expand the circle of people responding to their beliefs, thereby increasing the potential for growth toward sophisticated knowing of racial and multicultural issues, as well as broadening the opportunity for dissonance and personal redefinition through the reflection of others beyond the immediate classroom environment. Students are able to ask critical questions of authors that follow their own lines of thinking, helping them to establish and use critical thinking skills relative to issues of diversity. Beyond these effects, conversations such as these create the opportunity for students to see themselves as part of something larger than the classroom environment, to connect with people outside of their campus who are also trying to figure out what they believe and how to act congruently with their beliefs.

Another theme to emerge from this pragmatic perspective on multiculturalism, and one which is consistent with contemporary views of multiculturalism (Banks 2002), is a focus on

knowledge construction. As a student of pragmatism and teacher of multiculturalism, I want to encourage students to think about the way in which they are thinking about multiculturalism. One of the critical pieces to this orientation is to explore different means of making knowledge that underlie the multicultural movement. One way I've tried to do this is by incorporating service learning into the class. By having students select different sites through which to experience multiculturalism and then deliberately integrating the examination of these experiences into both the classroom and writing assignments, I hope to expand the classroom beyond the conventional walls and insert lived experience with race and racial inequality into the class environment as a valid way of knowing. Rather than only "learning" from books, films and other conventional authorities, through the service learning environments students can begin see themselves as knowledge producers and interpreters of racial material, and to counter the typical privileging of intellectual over emotional and spiritual ways of learning.

Due to the focus on the "collective" in pragmatism, perhaps the most important element of the pragmatic multicultural education class is what the students are doing rather than the traditional focus on what the teacher is "teaching." I try to keep this focus central to the course by actively asking students to raise issues they experience relative to multiculturalism and addressing campus-wide issues that are ever-present. This past semester, for example, our campus learned of what was called the "Blackface incident" where two male students dressed as Venus and Serena Williams, complete with blackface, for a fraternity Halloween party. Our class returned to this incident many times over the course of several months; discussion started with determining whether this incident constituted an act of racism and advanced to issues such as how to discuss the matter with people who didn't understand why the incident created such racial tension on campus. Teaching with these controversies as the primary "text" helps students

focus the more academic and theoretical material of the class on the moral problems they currently face, while attending to the moral purposes of the classroom with particular fervor and passion.

Other ways that I try to orient the class toward the work and issues of students is with extensive introductions over several class days, student-created goals and expectations for the course, frequent formal and informal surveying of students' reactions to the class and the pedagogy of the course, and an idea I adapted from (Tatum 1992) called a "Thoughts Tape."

Introductions usually last for at least some part of each class session during the first two weeks, beginning on the first day where I ask students to bring an object to class that represents their racial background and use it as an opportunity to tell the class about themselves and their racial identity. Many students report that this exercise is difficult; for some it is the first time they have thought about their racial identification. Subsequent introductions are often done with changing pairs of students and concentric circle exercises where the group examines some issue or short reading by responding to stem questions.

Communally-determined and driven expectations and class goals are other important elements to a pragmatic multicultural classroom. During the first two weeks of the course I ask students to bring to class some ideas about what they would like to learn and experience in the course, along with some expectations that would be necessary to achieve these goals. Students meet in small groups for a short time sharing their ideas and rewriting the language to account for overlaps and differences. Then they present their goals to the larger group; after we synthesize the goals, we then turn the conversation to the types of behaviors we need in class to foster these goals. This past semester students created a list of goals that included items such as "don't raise hands, bring personal experiences to class and share with others, feel more

comfortable talking about backgrounds and use appropriate language when doing so, share our knowledge from this class with others" (Class list EDUC 225). The expectations students determined to reach these goals included items such as "make sure to listen to all a person has to say, if you don't understand or want to comment ask for clarification or paraphrase, use each other's names when addressing them or building on what someone has already said, keep things said in class confidential, be sensitive and forgiving towards words that are used" (Class list EDUC 225).

At least twice each semester before the final evaluation of the course I ask students to write some of their reactions to the course. As Tatum (1992) advises, I usually inform students that during certain points in class, their emotional reaction to their racial identity development may make them want to stop coming to class, or withdraw in other ways. Surveying students periodically and meeting with small focus groups helps increase student reflection about the course and gives them an outlet for their emotions. It also formalizes our opportunity to collectively address problems that may be occurring in class. I collect written responses to open ended questions, collate the comments, and make overheads of all the anonymous responses. We spend significant time examining how we're doing as a class in reaching our goals and considering what we need to adjust in order to get there. Such actions, I believe, reinforce the idea that students are in charge of making the experience of the classroom, and that they have the power to alter the course of the class should it not be meeting their expectations.

The "Thoughts Tape" exercise is designed to help students get a clearer sense of their ideas about race, their own racial identity, and their stereotypes about others. In the beginning of the course I ask students to explore their beliefs on these issues on a cassette that they will pass into me. I assure them that no one, including myself, will listen to the tape; it will be kept in

strict confidentiality. For preparation for the final class period, I give back each students' tape, and after listening to their original thoughts, they create a 10 minute presentation on the changes they've experienced or the new questions that have arisen for them since the beginning of the semester. Almost unanimously, students claim this experience, along with the racial autobiography, to be one of the most powerful learning activities we have explored in class.

Final thoughts

Despite my good intentions and what I believe to be the appropriate use of these pedagogical tools in the multiculturalism classroom, I still have to account for considerable difference in comments my previous multiculturalism courses have elicited from students. As I continue to consider this question I am moved by my wish to concretely *name* the pattern and thus avoid it in the future. But alas, such a goal is highly connected to dualistic thinking that suggests that if only I could diagnose the problem, I could find a universal solution to serve as its antidote. Instead, thinking about this course from a pragmatic view convinces me of a central pragmatic tenet of teaching: 1) there is no universal construction of a multiculturalism course that is perfect for achieving all goals for all students. Each different configuration of students, each set of circumstances on campus, as well as the configuration of developmental status positions of the students and myself influence how the course is received and the kinds of work we can do together. Just as racial identity is an ongoing spiraling process, the construction of this course and its activities requires that it be understood as a process; such an understanding requires that I continually view this course as an dialectical process between the students and myself who inhabit the course and engage in the course activities, readings, and experiences.

These two sets of factors come together in unique ways each time it is taught, making the experience new and different each and every time.

This past semester I offered this course yet again; this semester the course had one Student of Color, twenty-one White Students, and myself. The outcomes were tremendously different; overwhelmingly the course evaluations described this class as a success. A pragmatic analysis helps me resist the temptation to attribute this course's apparent success solely to particularities of the class that I control such as the readings, service learning sites, and scheduling, and focus instead on the *interactions* that produced such comments. Just as important as the question of why my earlier offering of this course resulted in negative student comments is the question of why this past semester's offering seemed to work well for most students. A pragmatic orientation helps me see this constant questioning as essential because such questions help thwart dualistic thinking. The course is evolving, and so am I. Each time this course is offered, it will and should be different.

Notes:

[1] Throughout this paper I will be capitalizing "Students of Color" and "White Students" as a sign that these groups name particular people, rather than only serving as generic labels for collections of diverse individuals with vast ethnic, national, and cultural origins.

[2] Pragmatism would also suggest that such an analysis include an examination of my interactions with students within the classroom setting. This is an important feature of a complete analysis, one which I take up in a separate paper.

[3] It is important to note that superficial similarities, such as the congruence between the status positions for both Whites and People of Color, has troubled some theorists. One example is Rowe, Bennett and Atkinson (1994) who suggest that rather than drawing similarities between the developmental progression between Whites and People of Color, Whites have significantly more work to do in this arena. This work among Whites is, according to these authors, better described as coming to White racial consciousness. See (Rowe 1994).

[4] Interested readers should consult Jones (2000), Evans (1998), Magolda (1999), and Moreland (2001) for indepth study of various elements of college student development.

[5] For a more detailed account of racial identity theory see Helms J.E., & Parham, T.A. (1996). The Racial Identity Attitude Scale. In R.L. Jones (Ed.), *Handbook of tests and measurements for Black populations* (Vol. 2), (pp. 167-174). Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry Publishers.

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Table 1: Racial Identity Development Status Positions of People of Color[5]

People of Color Racial Identity Development
Conformity
Dissonance
Immersion
Emersion
Internalization
Integrated Awareness

Table 2: Racial Identity Development Ego Status Positions of White People

White Racial Identity Development
Contact
Disintegration
Reintegration
Pseudo-Integration
Immersion
Emersion
Autonomy

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